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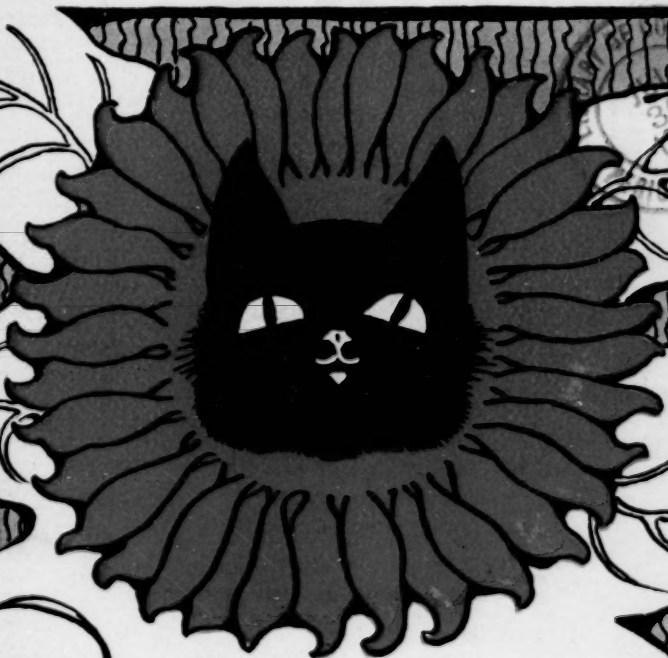
The Black Cat



AUGUST 1910

Contrary to Orders
Fanny L. McKinney

For Luck
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The Klearbrook Gold Rush
Randolph Bartlett

Inside the Rope
Edward Allison Gale

Smedley's Secret Service
Frank M. Bicknell

The House of Dreams
Batterman Lindsay

By the Law of Islam
Michael White

Ten Cents

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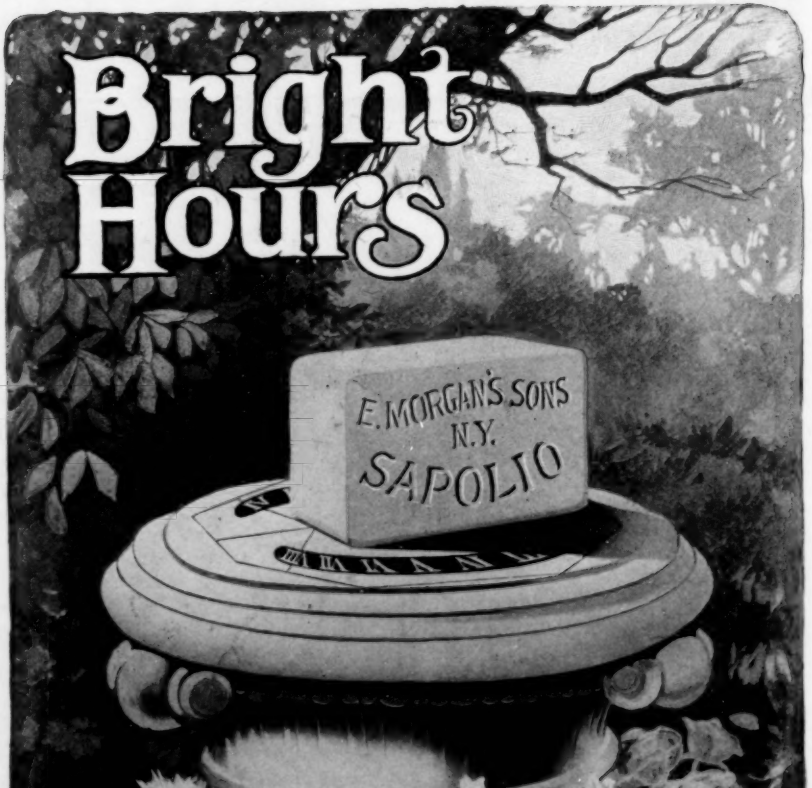

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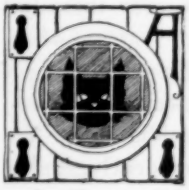
Contrary to Orders.*

BY FANNY L. McKINNEY.



LADY to see you, Miss," said a maid servant, holding out a bit of pasteboard to Miss Soames, the nurse, who roomed in the second floor front. The card read "Mrs. Howard Jefferson," with no address. When Miss Soames entered the boarding-house parlor, a deep room and at this hour of the morning quiet and dark as a cave, she saw leaning back in a shadowy corner a tall, elderly lady dressed in mourning.

"Mrs. Jefferson?"

"Ah, Miss Soames." Mrs. Jefferson's voice was well modulated and cold. She wore a close hat and a heavy net veil bordered with two wide stripes of crape. These bands, as the veil was adjusted, concealed her lower face entirely. All that Miss Soames could see was white hair parted over a wide forehead, fine dark eyes, and pale cheeks.

"I believe you are night nurse at Mr. Jefferson Verriam's?"

"I am."

"Miss Soames, I have a peculiar request to make of you, and yet not so strange when I explain it all." She paused a moment as if to arrange her words. "I am a near relation of Mr. Verriam's. You have probably heard (nurses cannot avoid picking up the in-

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timate history of their patients) that there have been quarrels, terrible ruptures in his family. I will not go into these matters. It is enough to say that a certain faction came out victorious and now rule in that house. All who opposed them or who found the slightest favor with that — with his unfortunate wife — are under a ban. I am among those banished, barred out from their circle. Nevertheless I am — I have — a very great affection for Mr. Verriam, the strong affection an aunt feels for a favorite young nephew. It is exceedingly painful for me to be — the present state of affairs makes me very unhappy. I now come to my request. I am going abroad soon to make my home in England. What I wish — I know this will sound strange to you — is merely that you will admit me to his room secretly when he is sleeping, that I may look at his face once more before I go." It seemed that Mrs. Jefferson's voice trembled a very little over these last words.

Miss Soames felt herself in an embarrassing position. Of course she could not comply with the strange plea. It would transgress every code of professional and personal obligation. Yet the visitor was a lady, elderly, in mourning, and evidently, underneath her cold manner, in deep trouble of mind. It was hard to refuse her.

"Mrs. Jefferson, are you sure this visit could not be managed openly?"

The older woman looked piercingly at her interlocutor. "You know the other inmates of that house, Mrs. Blashton and her mother?"

"I have met them since I have been on duty there."

"Do you think it likely that any one on whom they frowned, whom they regarded as an interloper, would find it easy to open a door that they had closed against her?"

Miss Soames smiled grimly. "Frankly, I do not. But I am afraid — and so sorry — that I cannot help you. You see — "

"Pardon me! I know all that you are going to say. Professional honor forbids you to do anything clandestine in the house of your employers. You fear your patient might receive some harm. You are not in charge of the case, but will refer me to Miss Rice, the day nurse. You would like to ask the doctor be-

fore considering the matter. If you consented and the thing were discovered it would ruin your career. I have thought of all these things. But I must come secretly and at night if at all. Listen! The fourth floor of Mr. Verriam's house contains the servants' sleeping-rooms. From the corridor at the back a door opens upon a small balcony, which communicates also with the next house. The stairs lead down directly from this door, and at the foot of those stairs is the room you sit in when you are not in the sick-room. You see I know the house.

"Now all that I ask you to do for me is to see that that balcony door is unlocked at midnight to-night. (It must be to-night. I leave the city to-morrow.) You will be with your patient, or you will be sitting in that room. I will enter. If he is asleep I will pass into the sick-room for one moment and then out again and away. You can tell me the hour when servants are not likely to be about. But Rosa sits in the other hall, does she not? Don't look so astonished at my knowledge. I was once a frequent visitor at that house. I know their customs in sickness."

Agnes Soames was staring oddly. One meets with queer characters in the city. Suppose — ?

The lady leaned over and touched her arm. "My child, I can see exactly what is in your mind. You are wondering if I am an imposter. You took me at my face value at first, but now something I have said has aroused your suspicions. Let me think." She mused. "Is there a telephone here? Then — not long ago you had a case in East Twentieth Street, an old lady, Mrs. Philip N. Harvey. Am I not right? Mrs. Harvey is very fond of you and you have a high regard for her? Very well. Call Mrs. Harvey on the telephone now and ask her about Mrs. Howard Jefferson. Ask her anything you like. I will wait for you here."

Miss Soames shook her head and smiled. "Pardon me if I did look suspicious. You see this is rather a singular interview. But Mrs. Harvey's name is a talisman with me. It ought to be, I'm sure, after the kindness I've met with at her hands. I won't need to call her up. Nevertheless — Oh, I don't see how I could do as you wish. It might involve so much."

"Really, Miss Soames, I don't know why it should. I think your fears have rather a slight foundation. For me to come in

secretly by that roundabout way, simply to look for a moment at the — at your — at Mr. Verriam while he is sleeping. He is usually asleep at that hour, is he not? Of course I would not let him see me."

"Oh, as to that — did you not know? He could not see you at any time. He is blind."

The strange lady's hands stiffened and shot forward. "Blind!" she cried in fear. "Oh, no! No!"

"Yes. I am sorry to have to tell you. Ever since the accident and his nervous collapse following it. I fear he will never see again."

"Blind!" The visitor rose, groped her way to a chair by a distant table, where she sat down with her back to the nurse and putting her hands up under her veil, began to sob brokenly.

Miss Soames did not know what to do. She was a warm-hearted young woman, and the scene was beginning to move her to an extraordinary degree. After a minute she went nearer Mrs. Jefferson and tried to say some words of comfort.

"Blind! Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Suddenly the stricken woman rose, adjusted her veil and turned her now tragic eyes upon the young nurse.

"Miss Soames, I have but one more argument. You — I know something about you. You had one brother, a fine fellow, a surgeon in the army and stationed in the Philippines. There he died of a slow fever, alone. Toward the end he called piteously for 'Mother! Agnes,' but they were not near to answer. The cablegram which might have brought them, through carelessness, was never sent, and the letters came too late. Your mother, now dead, broke her heart with thinking of that bedside she never reached, that tossing head her arms might have pillowed, that lonely, dying boy she might have comforted. And yet you deny me a glimpse of the one I love. You won't admit me just to glance at him from across the room."

Miss Soames was now crying bitterly. "You may come," she managed to say after a moment, and still weeping, stretched out her hand. The other woman pressed it gently for a second, and then was gone.

When Agnes Soames had wakened from her day's rest it oc-

curred to her to call up her friend Mrs. Harvey. This she did, not from any motive of doubt, but because she had become deeply interested in her visitor of the morning. Mrs. Harvey was well acquainted with the older generation of society, and liked to be regarded as an authority on such unwritten history as relationships, ages, and family resemblances. But a servant answered her call to say that her mistress was out of town; she was away on a visit to her sister in Massachusetts. An hour later, however, Miss Soames was called to the telephone and was surprised to hear the voice of Mrs. Harvey herself. Some people had brought her back from the Berkshires in their motor car. She had been thinking of her young friend and so she had called her up at once.

"An odd thing too, child, I am not subject to warnings or visions, but I have been possessed since last night with the thought that you were in danger of some kind."

Agnes laughingly vouched for her own safety. As soon as possible she brought in her inquiry.

"Mrs. Howard Jefferson? Yes, I knew her fairly well. She was some relation of the Verriams — aunt to the present generation, I think, and connected too with the girl poor Jeff married. You said you were on a case there, did you not? Poor fellow, he —"

"Could you describe her looks? Mrs. Jefferson's, I mean?"

"Certainly, I never forget people's features. She was tall, very erect, always dressed in deep mourning. Her eyes were dark and piercing. And her hair grew to be extremely white."

"But Mrs. Harvey, why do you speak of her in the past tense? You say she *was* tall, and so forth. What do you mean?"

"I mean in her lifetime. She is dead, is she not?"

"Indeed, she is not dead, Mrs. Harvey. I saw her and talked with her this morning."

"Well, that is odd. I was under a positive conviction that she died two or three years ago and left a good bit of money to poor Jeff. But I am getting old, my dear, and I go out in society so little. If I ever meet her I'll tell her how I was composing her obituaries."

Miss Soames went on duty at nine o'clock in the evening. Her way led across the city eastward, up the avenue and into one of

the wealthy streets that open upon it. It was a cold February night, dry under foot, but with light little snowflakes pelting down and the promise of a harsh wind. As the nurse drew near to her destination her eyes wandered from the home of the sick man with its many softly lighted windows to the next house beyond, which presented a wider front and was more showy architecturally. She had never noticed this house especially and she did not know who lived there, but it must be the one the fourth floor balcony of which communicated with the Verriam's. Just now there was not a light to be seen there from basement to roof.

Everything was just as usual about the sick-room. Miss Rice gave parting directions and left for the night. Rosa, the maid who stayed on duty in the hall, took her place there with some sewing. A last visit from the doctor might be expected between ten and eleven, and about that time the patient's cousin, Mrs. Blashton, would come to make inquiries and perhaps to say a few words to the sick man, if he were able to see her. More often he was not, and she would slip away after taking a sharp inventory of the nurse and of every ordering of the apartments. Miss Soames decided that when these ceremonies were over, and her patient was settled for the night, she would lock all the doors except the one toward the balcony stairs and leave them so until after her midnight visitor had gone.

As the evening wore on she found herself dwelling on this expected visit and growing apprehensive about it in a peculiar way. It was not that she feared a scene. No one ever came to the room late, unless she called them, and Rosa was privileged to lie down on a couch and sleep after midnight. No, but the thing was out of the every-day, bread-and-butter order of experience. That emotional interview had left a strong impression. How did Mrs. Jefferson know her own story and the saddest chapter of it? And again and again her mind would go back to Mrs. Harvey's odd way of speaking about the strange lady, as if she belonged to past decades. Each time these thoughts possessed her mind Miss Soames's glance would turn quickly toward the door through which she saw in imagination a black-gowned figure enter.

At half-past ten the doctor arrived. He reported a stormy night outside with prospects of something like a blizzard. After his

visit to the sick man he and the nurse came out into the sitting-room together and talked in low tones.

"He does not respond to treatment as he should," said the doctor. "Oh, I understand that the man's will is not with us, and that's half the battle lost. But one thing is certain. He must be kept absolutely quiet and free from any kind of disturbance or shock. I would not answer for the consequences if anything of that kind should occur." He gave some directions, then added in a whisper, "That woman — I mean the lady here, Mrs. Blashton, — don't admit her to him if it can possibly be avoided. I can see bad effects each time."

The doctor had been gone but a few minutes when Mrs. Blashton herself came in. She had been dining out and was handsomely gowned. Here was a woman whose good looks, fine figure, and perfect grooming might have insured her the sort of homage and power she craved, if they had not been marred by the hard expression habitual to her and by the bitter discontent in her black eyes. Force of intellect her face showed too, but a force which had battened on stratagem and schemes for forcing a stiff-necked fate to her own preferment.

Miss Soames knew the story of the household, the story, that is, as it filtered in from the servants, from the other nurses, from a thousand small events which told it daily. The cousins, Jefferson Verriam and Sarah Tillmay, had been engaged to be married. Or rather they had been parties to a sort of alliance arranged between the families and cemented by the prospect of thus uniting two large fortunes. People whispered that there was another bond, albeit a one-sided one. While young Verriam was an indifferent accessory to the plan, Sarah Tillmay was the ardent lover, flinging round him every desire of a passionate and selfish nature. One day the whole scheme fell asunder when young Jefferson announced that he loved a young girl, a connection of the family and a sort of dependent in the Tillmay household, and that he was determined to marry her. Trouble and bitterness followed that hour. Jefferson Verriam married the girl of his choice, but not without terrible affrays, family battles of wrath, malice, slander. They hastened the death of his own father and mother, cast a cloud over his prospects, and did not leave his young bride

untouched, but sought to spatter even her with the soot of calumny. His cousin Sarah, in a climax of pique, married the first suitor available, Herbert Blashton. After three warring years she became his widow. He was poor; her own fortune had met with reverse, and she was left with little to live on except an accumulated hatred.

Of the events which followed every person would tell a different story. Sarah Blashton, apparently forgetting old scores, grew intimate in the young Verriam's house. Mrs. Verriam had become a very beautiful woman. They had no children. Suddenly — so suddenly that the public had the facts before friends and relatives had heard a whisper — the Verriam household was riven by an ugly scandal, young Mrs. Verriam being the one condemned. Between husband and wife there was no reasonable accounting. Pride on one side and a blaze of anger on the other sped the accused girl from the door and locked it behind her. They separated, pending a divorce, people said, though others asserted that Jefferson Verriam would never begin divorce proceedings. In less than a year, while driving his own motor car, he met with a terrible accident (perhaps by his own intent ?) and was brought home half broken to pieces. Mrs. Blashton and her mother, now his nearest relatives living, came to take charge of his house.

"Good evening, Miss Soames, has the Doctor called yet?"

"Yes, he has just left."

"Ah, too bad! I meant to have a talk with him. What did he say about my cousin's condition?"

"He found it rather discouraging, I think. The weak pulse and his apathetic state mentally are against him."

"Yes, yes. He should be roused. I doubt if the doctor knows just what is needed to break up this lethargy. I may see him, I suppose." She was already moving toward the door.

"I am sorry, Mrs. Blashton, not to-night. The doctor's orders for absolute quiet were very strict."

The older woman flashed an unpleasant glance. "Surely that did not mean the visits of his nearest kindred?"

"I am afraid it meant any and all visitors. I have never known the doctor to be more emphatic about it."

"Oh, very well. Doctors' orders must be obeyed, of course. I hope they will be observed as strictly in all respects. If I am forbidden to enter, other disturbing influences should be kept out with even more conscientious rigor. I refer to anything that recalls the past, my cousin's distressing past. It has occurred to me that it might be wise to give this hint. Do you follow me, Miss Soames?"

The younger woman felt herself wince before her employer's sharp gaze. Yet she managed to keep her own eyes steady. There was a cross-fire of glances for a moment. Then Mrs. Blashton left the room.

For half an hour the nurse was busy getting her patient settled for the night. He was already dozing, and would probably sleep well till two o'clock, or three. His face seemed to cleave the pillow sharply like a wedge, crossed by the black shutter over his eyes. Miss Soames was used to the pitiful looks of sickness, yet tears would sometimes start to her eyes as she looked down on this sad wreck, the face so young, yet marked with age like a blight. To-night her hands trembled so that she could hardly get through her tasks. The doctor's strictures, Mrs. Blashton's suspicious looks, made the thing she had undertaken to do seem like lunacy. She was thoroughly frightened. But she had made a promise to one whose unhappiness plead piteously for help. She felt bound to keep it.

The house was now quiet for the night. An occasional click of Rosa's scissors proved her to be on duty in the front hall. It was time to unlock the balcony door.

Agnes Soames left the sitting-room by a rear door and crept up the narrow flight of steps. What if the men servants should hear strange noises or the cook? But their chambers were beyond the trunk-room. The strange lady knew that too perhaps. Agnes had been up these stairs once or twice before and had opened the balcony door on one occasion to admit fresh air to the rooms below, but she had never glanced outside. She drew back a bolt. The door stuck and required strength to open it. She gave a hard jerk. The door burst open as if propelled by a giant, and into the passage swept sheets of snow and a shrieking wind which seemed to have driven up from far out on the Atlantic to crouch and

force admittance at this very door. Curtains flapped, a door farther along slammed shut, the gust went tearing through the house. She threw her shoulder against the door and then stood listening. No one seemed to have waked. Faintly she heard snores from the servants' rooms. A clock below chimed the quarter before twelve. Curiosity impelled her strongly. With greater caution she opened the door again and stepping outside, shoe deep in snow, pulled it to behind her. The blizzard beat in her face and blinded her at first; she had to crouch against the lintel for support. Then she saw that she stood on a narrow gallery surrounded by a balustrade. She was at one end of it, and here at her left hand was the eastern wall of the Verriam house. The balcony extended beyond this, and at the farther end was another door, which must communicate with the next house. Leaning as far forward as she dared she saw that this other door had a curtained window in its upper half. No light gleamed behind it, nor did any window in the wall below show the faintest illumination. She would have liked to try that other door, but she would not stay away from duty any longer. Leaving the bolt unfastened she returned to the sitting room below, having been absent but a few minutes. Her hair and the shawl she had thrown about her were shining with melting snow.

The sick man was deep in his first sleep. Miss Soames went out to Rosa, who was just preparing for her midnight nap.

"Rosa, who lives in the next house on that side?"

"On that side, Miss? Why, to speak rightly, no one. That is, no one now. The house belonged to Francis F. Pell, Senior, and his estates have not been arranged satisfactorily, I believe, Miss. Anyhow his nephew is abroad now two years and the house stands partly furnished but no one there."

"What, not even a care-taker, Rosa?"

"Not any that's living in the house. A woman comes every day to see after things. Oh, I know it looks inhabited like from the front, but they leave things open that way, thinking it's safer from burglars or thieves than a shut-up house. Well, if there's nothing further you wish, would it do for me to lie down here now? Thank you, Miss. Good-night."

Agnes Soames went back to her sitting-room and locked the

door softly behind her. One more look at the patient, then she took some work and seated herself beside a table with a lamp upon it. But her hands clenched themselves together and refused to hold the needle. An empty house! Closed for two years! What could come out of it on a winter midnight and enter by a storm-swept balcony? Shivering, she laid aside her work and drew a chair before the fire. Something like a panic shook her, fears of she knew not what. A person whom Mrs. Harvey believed to be three years dead had come to her to-day, touched the secret springs of her own closed past, and had drawn forth a promise she never would have given in calmness. Sometime after midnight what would grope out of that unlighted door, prick the drifted snow, and steal down to this very room? Would anything — or nothing? Ugh! This was absurd for a sane, professional woman of experience and training. She stirred the fire, rose and walked about, examined the pictures on the walls. This, she knew, had been young Mrs. Verriam's room, but every trace of her had been removed and even the hangings and pictures changed, under Mrs. Blashton's orders.

Miss Soames tried to quiet herself by speculating on the story of the man in the next room. Bye and bye she became calmer. She persuaded herself that either she or the strange lady had made some mistake. Taking up a novel she settled herself near the fire again and after a time became interested in its pages. Two o'clock chimed. Just after that Agnes Soames heard a noise. It was like a long breath that went sighing past the door. She knew. It was a gust of wind from the balcony. She rose to her feet; her breathing seemed to stop; she could feel her scalp move, and the hair above her temples. The door in front of her opened, closed. A woman stood before her, looking at her.

It seemed to the young nurse that she had never beheld a creature more lovely. She was a tall woman in hat and cloak of dark fur. From this setting her face shone out, youthful, kindled with strong feeling and excitement, and lit by glowing dark eyes. Her cloak, hat, and the edges of her dark hair were full of melting snow flakes.

The two stood wide eyed, gazing at each other for a brief second. The visitor was the first to move, and she moved swiftly.

Slipping off her long cloak and her hat she flung them upon a chair. Her gown was of cloth, a street dress. Her parted hair was soft and gleaming. Without speaking, she walked quickly to the sick room. The nurse followed confused, terrified.

What she saw from the door-way made her turn cold with alarm. All at once she felt that the confusion in her mind had cleared away like smoke before the wind. She had been duped. This person was a thief, or burglar, or else — could Mrs. Blashton's fears be just?

Instead of going to the sick man's bedside, the woman, without even looking that way, turned to a chest of drawers that stood near the door. Taking some keys from her belt she fitted one to the lock of a small drawer and opened it. It appeared to contain papers. She began to turn them over.

Miss Soames stood in the door-way, thinking fast. Above all, her mind was on her patient. Once get the woman free of the sick room and she believed she could arouse the house and prevent her escape. But there must be no disturbance here.

The visitor gave a low sound of satisfaction. She drew out a bundle of papers, letters they seemed to be, which she hid in the front of her dress. Then she turned and looked toward the bed. Poor Jeff Verriam lay with his face the other way. The woman drew a quick breath and covered her eyes with her hands. Softly she passed around to the other side of the bed and dropped on her knees by his pillow.

Miss Soames's alarm took a new form. She decided it was now time to interfere. When she came inside the room she saw that the woman was not touching the sick man or even the bed, but that her face was working and her breast heaving.

"Madam," said the nurse in a suppressed voice, "if you value his life in the least, you must go."

"I know," came the answer, chokingly, "but I am afraid I shall — I — I can't —" A terrific sob shook her.

Jefferson Verriam was awake. He stirred, turned, lifted his hand to his sightless eyes. "Who is here?" he said.

Perhaps with the hope of stifling her crying, the kneeling woman had caught up the edge of the bed-clothing and bowed her forehead upon the wooden frame of the bed. Jefferson Verriam

now raised himself slightly on one side and put out his hand. His fingers fell upon the smooth head, groped over it, touched the heaving shoulders.

"Barbara!" he cried.

"Oh, Jeff, my dear! my dear!" Their arms were about each other.

That instant Miss Soames heard a sound behind her. Turning, she saw Mrs. Blashton just within the doorway. Her face was dreadful to look upon. In the flash of time while they stood thus, the nurse knew at last her duty, and on which side she would play.

"That woman! what is she doing here! how did she get in?"

At the sound of these words spoken loudly and violently the man and woman drew apart.

"I say again, how did she get in? There has been some treachery." She swept Miss Soames a glance. "She shall be turned out. I will ring for the servants and they shall drive her out! Miss Soames, ring for Halbert."

Miss Soames did not move. Jefferson Verriam had raised himself to a sitting posture and turned his shuttered eyes toward his cousin.

"Sarah, you shall not turn Barbara from this house. If she has come here to me of her own will — you did come of your own will, Barbara?"

"Yes."

"Then she shall stay. She is my wife."

"Wait then! What are the papers she took just now from your locked chiffonier? I was just in time to see her there."

Mrs. Verriam drew out the bundle from her dress and laid it under her husband's hand. His fingers passed over it.

"Your letters to me before we were married, Jeff. If you died I could not bear that — that an enemy should have them."

"Sarah!" The sick man seemed almost to be taking on the color and energy of health. "She shall not leave this house. I know, I have thought it through many times as I lay here. Too hastily I let her go from me. There were calumnies I never believed. Barbara, you shall answer here now. Were those stories true or false?"

"False, Jeff, false! Not only in my life but in every beat of my heart I have been true to you."

"Then Sarah, she shall stay."

"And I — I and mine are to go, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am not ungrateful for your care of me. But this is my wife. Without her, I have been down into the valley of death."

No one saw what followed, for the nurse passed out, leaving husband and wife together. In the room outside she was needed at once to minister to the unhappy woman whose passion raged beyond control and gave way to the violent hysterics of anger.

The next time Agnes Soames met her old friend, Mrs. Philip Harvey, that autocratic lady attacked her at once on the subject of their last conversation.

"What could you have meant, child, by saying that you had been talking with Mrs. Howard Jefferson? It irked me to think I was getting so forgetful, so I made inquiries about her at the very first opportunity. The poor lady *is* dead — dead these three years, just as I told you. Now how could you have seen and spoken with her?"

Agnes smiled quietly. She would not transgress professional bounds again. "There was a mistake. Young Mrs. Verriam called upon me. A mistake in names you see." Well, perhaps not exactly that, but the story could not be told nor would it be credited, how love and humbled pride had led a clever woman to seek out information, disguise herself, and play a part fraught with risk. Mrs. Harvey herself was linked with the story only because she was supposed to be out of town on that day of event.

"What! Young Jefferson's wife? They say she has come back to him. They tell me the Blashton woman (whom I cordially detest, by the way) was the mischief maker there. Such a wild tale is going about, of young Mrs. Verriam gaining access to poor Jeff's room by going through her cousin Frank Pell's house and climbing in a window in a snow storm. Do you know anything of this? You've been nursing there."

Miss Soames looked thoughtful. "I hardly think the story is

true as you have it. But you see they have gone abroad and I am on the case no longer."

"But you say you saw her. They tell me she is handsome. What is she really like?"

Miss Soames did not need to guard her tongue this time. Her face lighted up rarely.

"Indeed, she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Moreover she is kind enough to call herself my friend, and I would do anything in the world for her sake, and sacrifice anything — even professional caution."

The Klearbrook Gold Rush.*

BY RANDOLPH BARTLETT.

AMES WILKINS was disconsolate and puzzled. By all the rules of the real estate booster, Klearbrook lots should have been owned, at least incipiently, by hundreds of residents of the city to which it aspired to be a suburb. The advertising was the very best possible, and the entire city was now familiar with the alluring poster:

KUM TO KLEARBROOK AND KEEP A KOW

Then, too, the terms were decidedly seductive. "You pay a little now, and the rest once in a while" they promised. But no one seemed to yearn for bucolic life in the suburbs, where "buying your home is like paying rent to yourself," only a mile from the nearest trolley line, and, best of all, with a beautiful stream rippling by the door.

The aforesaid beautiful stream was not what could be called perniciously active, except in the rainy season, when its ripples used to tear huge gouges in the banks; but, geographically speaking, it was present, and gave an excuse for the name, Klearbrook, although it was known as "Mud Crick" before the advent of Wilkins.

The real estate man had disposed of several tracts that had seemed to him even less promising, in the course of his career of promotion and speculation, and, as he sat in his little square

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shack, located at a corner where he decided the business centre of the future community would converge, he wondered if the crop of instalment purchasers had finally been all harvested. He had spent a considerable amount of money on the project, mostly in advertising and staking out quarter-acre homes for a city-weary populace, and he simply had to get it back somehow. Then there was the come-on house.

To those who still remain in heathen darkness, be it known that a come-on house is a near-residence, built upon an ambitious subdivision, as if it would say to those trembling on the verge of investment:

"Welcome to our fair city. If I can stand it, you can."

People have been known to live in these houses, even, but usually they are intended merely as a spot on the landscape for the agent to point at carelessly, with the remark:

"Mr. Sukah expects to move in next week."

Wilkins's come-on house had cost him nearly two hundred dollars, and still it was as unfruitful as a china egg under a setting hen. The public had failed to wreck his office in a frenzied clamor for Klearbrook realty, and something must be done at once. So Wilkins cogitated for a long time, and then gave it up as a bad job.

Finally he locked up the office, and started for his horse and buggy which he had left tied to a tree — or rather the tree. This misplaced piece of vegetable life had once caused Wilkins considerable mental perturbation. It took him nearly a week to decide that it was scarcely sufficient justification for advertising Klearbrook as a "thickly wooded district."

On his way to the rig, he half stumbled over a loose piece of crumbling, decomposed granite. He turned and looked at it profanely, and suddenly an illumination enveloped his mind. He whistled softly and meditatively. He smiled. He turned toward his buggy and his movement became purposeful. And he drove back to the city.

The next morning Wilkins went to the down-town office of the Klearbrook tract very early. This "office" was a desk inside a railing, seemingly elbowed off to one side by a crowd of other similar "offices." These were all products of the city's annual

real estate boom, which opened regularly with the Vernal Equinox and continued intermittently until about the twentieth of the following March.

The respective denizens told each other that the reason they occupied these inconveniently small quarters was because it was necessary for the real estate men to stand together, and show united strength, and all the rest of that Board of Trade talk, and then they would go out and lie about each other with clear consciences. They called it the United Realty Exchange, but the principal commodity exchanged with any degree of regularity, was stories about how somebody had once traded for a spavined horse the corner upon which the First National Bank now stood, and how they remembered that there used to be a blacksmith shop on the present city hall site. For it was one of these swiftly built western cities, which, like the Nile, overflows itself every year, and leaves prosperity simply oozing around the streets.

Wilkins hovered near the door of this institution with battle in his eye. He was determined to take a victim to Klearbrook that day, if he had to turn kidnaper. But luck was with him and desperate means were avoided. A stranger stopped at the entrance to the Exchange, and studied the array of signs uncertainly. Wilkins started for the street like a man in a hurry to go some place. As he passed the stranger he stopped and said:

"Looking for some one?"

"Not exactly. I was kind of thinking of buying a lot a little out of town, and —"

"All right. Come with me," said Wilkins. "I've got an appointment to meet some buyers out at Klearbrook, and you can come along and look the place over. I'll show you some other good tracts on the way. We real estate dealers help each other out that way."

So the Lamb started willingly for the slaughter.

As they drove along, the Lamb — he said his name was Henry Phillips — was regaled with glowing descriptions of Klearbrook, or at least of what Klearbrook was to be in the future. Never was the taint of commercialism to mar the sylvan simplicity of this rustic spot. No factories would be allowed to thrust their ugly smoke-stacks into its pure atmosphere. Free from the

dangers of street traffic, children could make the whole neighborhood their playground.

What were Mr. Phillips's views on the liquor question? Mr. Phillips's lips moved suggestively and he murmured something about "moderation." That was well, for there would be but one saloon in Klearbrook, and it would be conducted under the most severe restrictions.

Finally the last human habitation was passed and the tale not nearly finished. They began to draw near Klearbrook. Suddenly Wilkins sat back with a jerk that stopped the horse, gazed ahead, and ejaculated:

"Well, what do you think of that?"

The Lamb failed to discern anything disquieting in the prospect. In fact the scene seemed singularly devoid of excitement, so he held his peace.

"Giddap," yelled Wilkins, and whipped up the horse. As he stared ahead he gave vent to such expressions as, "Well, I'll be blowed," "Of all the nerve," "If that isn't the limit," etc., ad lib.

The Lamb found it necessary to concentrate all his energies upon maintaining his seat in the buggy, as it careened along the road in its wild career, and Wilkins seemed so absorbed in indignation that he contented himself with awaiting developments. Soon they reached the big sign that enlightened those who wandred so far afield that this was the boundary of Klearbrook, and Wilkins drove across lots to a little round tent.

"Hello in there," he called.

A heavy set man, with whiskers to match, appeared with a shotgun in his hand.

"Keep off this claim," he called, "or I'll blow ye into the next county."

"Claim?" Wilkins roared back at him. "Who do you think you are talking to?"

"I don't know and don't care. All I got to say is, keep off."

Wilkins was growing purple in his rage, and the Lamb began to tremble lest shooting should begin. He was an Eastern Lamb and had no desire to be even a close spectator in such deeds of Western violence as he had read about.

"I'd have you know," yelled Wilkins, "that I'm the agent of this tract."

"Well, I'm a prospector," replied the man with the whiskers, "and I've found colors in this 'ere rock, and if you own the hull darn township you can't make me move. I've got the statoots of Califrado on my side, and they say that a man has the right to protect an unfiled claim with violence. I ain't got my papers ready yet, and until then visitors is strictly barred."

Wilkins sat back and stared at the man open-mouthed.

"Gold!" he gasped, "In Klearbrook?"

"Yep. You been asleep, stranger. She goes twenty-five to the ton or I'm a tenderfoot."

"Any more of it besides what you located?"

"Can't say. One claim's all I can handle. I stumbled on this yesterday, and you bet I didn't lose any time chasin' more. Just got my outfit up before you come along."

By this time the Lamb's eyes were so wide open that he could have worn a monocle.

"I don't believe there's any law going to let you grab my lots for a gold mine," said Wilkins.

"Don't you worry," replied the prospector. "You'll get well paid for what lots I take."

"Well, I'll see the District Attorney and find out about this," and Wilkins turned the horse toward the city.

Pregnant silence reigned in the buggy for a considerable time, as the real estate man and the Lamb drove back. Then the Lamb said:

"I suppose you will take Klearbrook off the market now."

"No, I hardly think so," replied Wilkins, slowly. "If that fellow has struck gold it's probably the only streak in the neighborhood, and there's so few lots left we might as well sell 'em and get them off our hands."

Then, apropos of nothing at all, Wilkins began to tell of how gold strikes had been made on town sites in other places, and how real estate had quadrupled in value in astonishingly short time as a consequence. The result of it all was that the Lamb was so fortunate as to obtain two lots near those preempted by the prospector.

Wilkins then insisted that the Lamb should accompany him, as a witness, to the District Attorney's office. That official listened to the story, and informed the real estate man that the prospector was entirely within his rights according to an old law of the Califrado legislature, passed for protection against claim jumping in the pioneer days. So Wilkins left, raging volubly.

Now, the District Attorney was a friend of the editor of the *Daily Blade,* so he rang up the newspaper and told of the incident. The newspaper sent two reporters and a photographer to the scene of hostilities, and they received much the same sort of reception that had been accorded Wilkins and the Lamb. Then they went to see Wilkins, and found him mysteriously reticent. Being very clever reporters, they knew that this could mean nothing but that Wilkins was concealing still more sensational news. So the next morning the *Blade* had headlines on the front page reading:

RICH GOLD STRIKE IN CITY'S SUBURBS

Armed Prospector Takes Possession of Klearbrook Lot and Defies the Owners

FURTHER REVELATIONS OF WEALTH EXPECTED

Agent Wilkins Refuses to Make any Statement—Believed to be Protecting Secret

A glowing article followed, illustrated with pictures of the prospector standing in front of his tent with a gun in his hand, of Wilkins, and of the Lamb, the latter being described as "Mr. Henry Phillips," who was so fortunate as to be early on the ground and obtain several valuable pieces of property."

There is just one vital point behind the work of all promoters — you can sell anything in the world, or out of it, if you find some one who knows absolutely nothing about your proposition. Hence it was that those who were versed in mineral lore simply smiled when they read the article in the *Blade,* knowing that there was no gold formation within a hundred miles of Klearbrook; but out at the scene of the discovery, early in the morning, there gathered a motley crowd of men who would not have known gold ore from coral reef.

The carnage that followed is too terrible to describe. Wilkins took money with each hand, and wrote receipts when he had time. Buyers jammed themselves into his little shack of an office, and the more determined ones handed their payments in through the window. And Wilkins, protesting that there were hardly any lots left, always managed to find just one more for the latest arrival, until five o'clock, when he finally declared that further Klearbrook purchases would have to be made from private parties, as the company had disposed of every inch of its holdings, except the lot the prospector had grabbed, and no one seemed to want to take a chance with the shotgun.

The crowds still lingered, however, and compared locations, discussing mining methods, of which they knew nothing whatever, and wealth in general, until nearly dark. Wilkins was busy behind the locked door of his office, counting his money and trying to make a coherent record of the day's business.

Finally the last speculator disappeared cityward, and then a strange thing happened.

"All clear, Jim," called a cheery voice through the darkness.

"Yep," answered Wilkins.

And the prospector sauntered in, pulled down the blind, removed his bushy whiskers, with a sigh of relief, tilted a chair back against the wall, and grinned.

"Well?" he said.

"Great. Sold every lot — every — darned — lot. And got at least ten per cent on every one, and sometimes more."

"There'll be a hell of a row."

"Why? Klearbrook lots are easily worth what we charged for them. We never raised the price a dollar. If they jumped at the conclusion they were getting gold mines for town lot prices, that's their mistake. But after their first spasm of disappointment, when you tell them that you were mistaken, and quietly disappear, they will begin to build houses out here, and in a year Klearbrook will be the nucleus of a thriving community."

And his prediction proved correct.

Smedley's Secret Service.*

BY FRANK M. BICKNELL.

T was too hot to sleep, and Smedley and I had been sitting on the veranda of his stone "cottage-by-the-sea" till, as the last stroke of twelve sounded from a distant clock, he rose, evidently with an intention which was not, however, to suggest going to bed.

"Old chap," he said, abruptly, "I'm about to show you something only one other man beside myself has ever seen, and that not even my wife suspects the existence of. Come inside."

His words and manner roused in me a curiosity which was not lessened by what immediately followed. When we had entered the house and he had closed the door, he continued apologetically:

"You won't take it ill, dear boy, will you, if I blindfold you for about three minutes? No reflection on your good faith, understand, but I'd a little rather you didn't see the route by which you go where I am taking you — if you don't mind."

I submitted to having a handkerchief bound about my eyes, and then he led me to a room which, from its leathery odor, I surmised must be the library. A short delay ensued, and I was conducted down a flight of stairs till presently I felt a cool draft upon my face. Smedley drew me forward a dozen paces on a level, I heard him close a door behind me, then he removed my bandage and I found myself in a small, clean, electrically lighted cellar.

"My safe deposit vault," he explained, "built it myself of concrete, so it is fire-proof, and, being hidden underground, is undiscoverable by burglars — or anybody else for that matter."

I was about to remark that he seemed not to have deposited anything very valuable there yet (a pine table and two kitchen chairs being the sole visible contents) when he went to one cor-

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ner of the room and slid downward a panel which had been concealed from notice before. The opening thus made showed a closet fitted with drawers, pigeon-holes and shelves. From one of the latter my host brought a japanned tin trunk which he set upon the table and unlocked. Motioning me to a chair, he raised the lid of the trunk and took out something that he laid before me for inspection. It was a neat packet of seemingly new one hundred dollar bills.

"An even hundred in that bunch," he told me, "and I've sixty-odd more like it here."

"Six hundred thousand dollars and upward!" I exclaimed, after a mental calculation. "Why, in the name of common sense, do you keep so much money idle? Why don't you invest it, bank it, do something with it to bring in dividends?"

"Wait! I haven't yet shown you the whole exhibit," he retorted, with a queer smile, and, re-entering the safe, he brought out a wooden box, placed it on the floor, and lifted from it a rather weighty rectangular object which he laid before me. "Focus your optics on that, will you."

I obeyed. The general nature of the block-like affair would have been evident to anybody who had ever seen a printing outfit. When a brief scrutiny showed me more particularly what it was I gave a startled cry and stared at Smedley without being able to add an articulate word.

"Just so," he said, nodding as if I had spoken, "and more of 'em in this box. Plates for making money, government notes, of first quality, too."

"How — how came you by them?" I finally managed to ask.

"Legacy," he answered, "cousin of mine died two months ago and left 'em to me to — to dispose of."

"Then why, in the name of sanity, don't you dispose of them?" I asked. "You might as well sit over a powder-mine as have them in your possession."

"Oh, there's no danger," he said, easily, "while I keep them in yonder cubby-hole, for at least three good reasons: firstly, nobody would or could know of this cellar; secondly, if they did they wouldn't know how to get into it; and thirdly, before that panel could be lowered, even if it were found, it would have to

be released from above-stairs, and I'll defy any one to discover that secret short of pulling the house to pieces. However, I shall burn the bills some day, and dump the hardware into the middle of the Sound; meanwhile I am keeping them as curiosities. They're probably the best things of the kind ever done. My cousin was an expert engraver for the Treasury Department and knew all there is to know about manufacturing paper money. Eleven years ago when he was dismissed — without just cause, he thought — he retired to obscurity with enough to live on, and for the sake of occupation took a fancy to see what he could do toward turning out a home product. I'm not sure when he began that he didn't have some idea of working off his grouch against the government, but if so he thought better of it, for he never tried to pass a single one of all the bills he made. And he might have done so safely enough, too."

A second blindfolding episode had intervened and I was again in the upper regions. Smedley said nothing about going to bed, and we had resumed our former seats on the veranda. Though the servants were asleep at the other end of the long, rambling house, it naturally would have been imprudent to talk of what he had shown me, so, by and by, for the sake of saying something, I asked my host if he expected his wife to be away long.

He did not speak for several moments and I thought he must have dropped into a doze, but finally he asked, with seeming irrelevance:

"Ever heard of Llewellyn Jones — Jam-and-jelly Jones? You've eaten his stuff, or at any rate seen his ads. 'Just try a jar of Jones's Jam. Jones's pure-juice Jelly is a joy. Be joyful! be jolly! buy jelly! buy jam! but be sure it's Jones's.' L. J. is out of it now, but the business is in the hands of a company and goes on jamming and jellying the public. I was in the old duffer's counting-room once for a few months, and for some reason he took a great fancy to me, so that we've been friendly ever since. He often asks my advice, and follows it, too, strange to say. I believe old Jam-and-jelly would do almost any earthly thing for me — except one, and I don't dare ask or even hint at that. We're connected by marriage, though he doesn't suspect the fact.

About four years ago his only son married an actress — as good a girl as ever lived; but Jonesy thinks all stage people are Satan's own selected, so he waxed wroth and told the boy to get out and never let him set eyes on him again. Young Jones wasn't much of a bread-winner, besides which he fell ill and died one day. By returning to the stage the widow contrived to support herself and their small son till she, too, broke down. The poor girl is dying now, and my wife, who is her sister, has gone to look after her. You might think grandpa would warm a trifle toward Jonesy Junior, but no, not any at all whatsoever! Last winter he had a bad fall on the ice and cracked his coco, and I believe every last drop of the milk of human kindness drained out — so far as his kith and kin are concerned. He always was a crank at his sanest, but now he has enough queer notions in his noddle to fit out half a dozen certificates of lunacy; and with them all he's determined to treat the widow and child as non-existent. He'll never do a thing for them — if he knows it. Jove ! wouldn't I enjoy tricking him into doing it, though, if only I could think up a way of working it!"

"He is very rich, I infer — in the millionaire class," said I, when Smedley finished rather heatedly.

"Y-e-s, he's in what might be called the infant class, though he'll drop out of even that when he goes to live in England, as he intends doing. He wouldn't clean up for much more than a quarter of a million sterling, I should estimate."

"He's thinking of expatriating himself, then?"

"Well, you see, he originated in Wales, and he yearns to go back and build a castle or a castlet in one of those Welsh places with unpronounceable names, spelled, you know, with a job lot of consonants stuck together with w's and y's. He has already converted all his property into cash, and is planning to tote the pile along over with him a few weeks hence. Now Lida and I are entirely willing to look after the widow as long as she lives, which can't be many days, and to adopt the infant; still it riles me to think how that crack-brained old sinner has gone back on his own flesh and blood, and I'm watching my chance to put a finger in the pie — a chance that may not come, still if it does, just keep your eye on S. A. Smedley, will you."

A month later came the news that the *City of Pittsburg* had struck a derelict and foundered with nearly all on board. Among the lost was Mr. Llewellyn Jones, and it was reported that a million dollars in gold that he was carrying with him had gone to the bottom too. Of course I was interested in this piece of intelligence, and I was on the point of trying to see and talk with Smedley again — I had learned that the now doubly orphaned Jones child was under his roof — when one evening he appeared at my rooms.

"I'm out for advice," he said, looking rather more sober than was his wont, "and as you always have plenty on hand, I'll apply here first. You've heard that old Llewellyn has availed himself of the stop-over privilege on his New York-Liverpool ticket to accept a pressing invitation to visit his cousin, Davy Jones."

"Yes; and he ought to be welcome if he took a million in gold with him."

"He did, and he took something else which only he and I knew about. A fortnight before he sailed he called me into consultation and — well, he had wheels all right, you could hear 'em buzz the moment you got near him. What do you think? But you'd never guess it in a thousand years. He was planning a unique feature for the billiard-room in his Welsh home, nothing less than a half million-dollar portrait gallery — and every portrait the same, a fine steel engraving of Abraham Lincoln, who was one of his pet heroes."

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed.

"You'd hardly believe it, would you? He intended to paper the walls of that room with nothing else than five thousand United States treasury notes, each of the hundred-dollar denomination. Oh, I told you he was dotty, and now I've proved it. He figured that his million in gold would get him a home and keep him for the rest of his days, and the half-million balance of his fortune he had the crazy idea of utilizing as wall-paper. Well, he asked me what I thought of the scheme, and I told him it was simply great — and boiled with futile rage inside all the while. But what could I do? In due time, provided with a million in coin stowed in the ship's strong room, and a half-million in hundred dollar bills in his steamer trunk, he left these shores. Four days

later that million and a half, all Jonesy's assets, and his will if he made any, sank to the bottom of the sea.

"Now here, my boy," Smedley continued, with much earnestness, "is where I ask your counsel. That gold is gone forever and is a dead loss, but the bills are different. That odd half-million would look mighty good to the juvenile Jones some years hence, when he gets to be rather less juvenile — "

"Undoubtedly," I interposed; "still I don't see how he is going to get it from the bottom of the Atlantic."

"He can't, but he ought to get the value those bills represent," Smedley returned, then, lowering his voice, and speaking into my ear, he asked, "Say, old man, how about my using for his benefit a half-million of that paper my cousin left me, that I showed you in the secret cellar?"

"Oh, Smedley, you can't be serious!" I protested. "That wouldn't be — it wouldn't do at all."

"But the United States owes young Jones five hundred thousand dollars, and that would be the easiest way to collect the debt. Congress isn't going to pass any refunding bill on my mere say-so to make good those submerged thousands — and little Jonesy needs the money."

"But," I still objected, "the way you propose giving it to him wouldn't be straight; beside which it would be dangerous to try to negotiate those bogus bills, cleverly done though they are. The whole business would be morally wrong at best," I concluded, earnestly, "and I advise against it, Smedley — I beg of you to give up the idea."

Smedley looked grave and rather glum. "I'm sorry, awfully sorry, you feel like that about it," he said, slowly, "because — well, I shall have to confess this advice of yours is *ex post facto* and too late to be of service. I am like the bad little boy who first ate up the cake and then asked his mother's permission. That japanned trunk I showed you is now empty, and I have put half a million into solid securities for the Jones infant."

I looked at Smedley in mournful reproof. "Why this farce of coming to me for advice, then?" I inquired.

Smedley showed his perfect teeth in a disarming smile, and, leaning forward, patted me affectionately on the shoulder.

"Don't you know," he asked, "that there are persons who seek advice in the hope that it will back them up in a line of action they have already fixed upon? I plead guilty to that count myself. Dear old boy, don't look so hurt. I am sometimes sorry, though often glad I haven't the mate to that conscience of yours; but cheer up, I am not quite the utterly depraved villain you suppose. I didn't mention, did I, that when old Jam-and-jelly sprang his paper-hanging scheme on me I offered my help? Yes, I said I was acquainted at the sub-treasury and could get him those Lincoln portraits very handily. He closed with my offer, and next day I took his checks for half a million in exchange for the hundred-dollar bills I got from the sub — I might say subterranean treasury."

He paused and winked, but the wink was hardly needed, for my wits had been sufficiently jogged already.

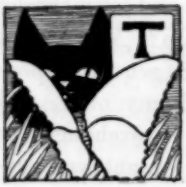
"Aha! yes, yes," I said.

"Exactly," he said, with a grin, "you get the idea. I didn't see," he went on virtuously, "why those phony bills of mine weren't just as good as genuine ones, to paper old Jonesy's billiard-room, and I was sure the real stuff would be a deal better to line young Jonesy's pocket; so I took advantage of the chance to put up young J's rating half a million, and as matters have turned out, I flatter myself I made a mighty lucky shot. I should have felt compunctions about working any confidence games on our good Uncle Samuel, but old Jam-and-jelly — I could bunco him without a quiver of a qualm. In consequence of which I have been able to invest for the rightful heir a substantial if involuntary legacy from his grandad. When he comes of age if he doesn't rise up and bless the name of his Uncle Sintram A. Smedley for the results of the secret service he did him once on a time, then I'm a futile blunderer and the prize dunce of class n. g.

"Well, old boy, do you feel better now? The queer bills, most of them, are at the bottom of the Atlantic, the remainder of them, with the plates, are beneath the waters of the Sound, the Jones kid is in clover, and all ends happily."

For Luck.*

BY MABEL KITTREDGE STEARNS.



HE best scholar; the best athlete; the best all-round man! It's not only ridiculous, it's terrible!"

There was real tragedy in Barbara Farwell's voice, as she spoke, and, to give better vent to her feelings, she pulled savagely her long black hair, which she was combing. Her younger sister continued to kick aggravating heels against the side of the trunk, on which she was perched, but she said nothing, for though deep in her heart she felt very mischievous, to all outward appearances she was as disturbed as Barbara.

"And it isn't only that," the speaker continued, "it isn't only having it said about him. It's because I know it's true. He never does anything wrong; he's always perfect. I'd feel better if he'd do something wrong, but he won't."

"No, he won't," echoed Cecil, mournfully, from the trunk.

"You know, Cecil," — another savage pull at the black hair, — "You know, I could never be happy with a perfect man. Why, he isn't even conceited; and just think what a fuss every one makes over him! It's enough to turn any man's head."

"Barbara," said the younger sister irrelevantly, "are you really going to refuse him again? He's sure to propose before Commencement is over. Don't, Barbara. He's awfully nice. I like Jack, immensely."

The girl at the mirror didn't answer. She was busy looking at her own dainty reflection with scrutinizing minuteness. The tangled masses of hair had been piled high on her forehead; a fitting crown to her queenly beauty. Finally, she turned; with a wave of her hand intimating that the subject was dismissed, for the present, at least.

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"Cecil, get dressed. In fifteen minutes the boys will be here and you are nowhere near ready. There's Jack now," she added, gazing out of the window. "He said he'd be over, for a minute, before the game. I'll just run down and give him this four-leaf clover, for luck."

She was gone, leaving behind her a girl whose face dimpled with merriment, and who flew around the room pulling open bureau drawers, upsetting trays to trunks, and leaving, everywhere in her wake, general chaos and confusion.

Mrs. Page, the wife of the college president, had invited the Farwell sisters to be her guests for Commencement week ; and here they were, full of life and beauty, and abounding in health and good spirits. Perhaps, in the heart of the kindly woman, there was the hope that, at last, that affair between Barbara and Jack Norton would come to something. She couldn't imagine how any girl could resist him for a single instant. He was, to her, the embodiment of all that was finest in a modern young man. He was the best scholar in his class ; the finest athlete in college ; the hero of the hour. He was handsome as a god, brilliant, fun-loving, and entirely unspoiled.

With an eye of pride, she now watched him swinging across the street towards the house. The latch-key was always out for him, and he knew and appreciated the fact.

Turning, at a slight rustle behind her, Mrs. Page saw Barbara descending the broad stairs. She made an enchanting picture in her dainty gown and large white hat. In one hand she carried a white parasol which was decorated with streamers of purple ribbon. At her waist she wore a large bunch of violets. The heart of the older woman warmed at the sight.

"You do my eyes good, Barbara," she said. "Jack is coming. I declare he is as handsome in his baseball suit as in evening clothes."

Barbara's face darkened, and she answered petulantly, "Oh, of course ! He's perfect anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstances."

There was a light step on the porch, a merry whistle, and then a handsome boyish face was thrust in at the door.

"Ready, Barbara ? By Jove, you look great, doesn't she, Mrs.

Page ?" but that discreet lady had already withdrawn, so Jack Norton came forward with outstretched hand, and Barbara put hers demurely into it.

"Are we going to win, to-day, Jack?"

"Of course. You'll be there and you're a good mascot."

"Am I? I didn't know; but here is a four-leaf clover, I found. Put it in your left shoe and then you will surely have luck."

The girl accompanied the gift with a sweet smile, and the enraptured young man, like any other ardent lover, kissed the gift and would gladly have kissed the giver, had he seen any chance of ever being forgiven for such a misdemeanor. Instead, he thanked her warmly, and then, lowering his voice, he said, "I shall walk home with you after the game, and, if it is not too late, will you go with me down through the grove? I am going to be so busy these days. I shall see little enough of you. Will you, Barbara? I shall have something to tell you, and ask you there, ask you again, Barbara."

As he spoke, the crimson color rose slowly and flushed her cheeks and forehead, and even her tiny shell-like ears, but she answered lightly enough, "Wait and see, the game may not be over till late. Here come the other men, and Cecil is coming too. Let go of my hand, Jack, and good luck."

. . . . . .

Bands playing, crowds cheering and laughing; merrymaking everywhere; much clapping of hands, as some well known favorite makes a star play. But this is only practice. When *will* the game begin? Impatient girls in pretty gowns, waving their favorite's colors; gay dèbonair college youths; gray haired alumni, "boys" again, just for to-day; the typical college commencement crowd, and on every one's lips the name of Jack Norton.

"There he is."

"Where?"

"That big handsome fellow knocking flies to the out-field."

"Corking player, isn't he?"

"I should say. Played the whole season, so far, with only one error, and in the last three games he has made eleven hits."

"Oh, Dorothy," called a young man to his pretty little sister, "there's Jack Norton, but you can't have him, he's *taken,*" and lowering his voice, he designated the exact position, in the grand stand, occupied by Barbara Farwell.

So the talk ran on and soon renewed cheering, followed by a tense stillness, showed to the waiting crowd of spectators that the most important game of the year had at last begun. It was to decide the championship of the "Triangular League"; the home team was in fine condition, the best battery was out, and Jack Norton, steady as a rock, was on "second."

The game went on, and by the end of the fifth inning, neither side had scored. The excitement was intense; the rival college had sent down some hundred and fifty men and the cheering was deafening. Then the heaviest batter on their team made a tremendous hit, way over third base, and the left fielder's head, a long low "liner." It was good for three bases, and a man who had reached "first" on a "Base-on-balls" came "Home." Score 1-0! No one out! The home team steadied down at once. The next man up was struck out; the next knocked a hot liner right at Jack Norton, who made one of his phenomenal, left-hand catches! and the roaring of the maddened throng became an unearthly clamor. The third man knocked a ball to the pitcher, who cleverly fielded it and then threw the runner out at "first." So ended the sixth inning.

Then the home team came to the bat, determined to "do or die." The first man up made a pretty little hit, between "first" and "second," and then, Jack Norton stepped up to the plate. His name was passed from mouth to mouth, and he was cheered and cheered.

"Ball two," sang out the umpire. "Strike one," as a ball whizzed by Jack's ear.

The crowd hissed, for it was far too high.

"Ball three!"

"Oh dear," said Barbara, "They're going to give him his base on balls. Horrid things."

"Hit it, Jack."

"Swipe at anything, old man."

"A home run. A home run."

"Now let him have it," screamed the "fans" from the bleachers. And Jack "let him have it." The ball flew straight over second base out beyond the reach of the frantic centre fielder; and then Jack ran! Seldom, on that field, had there been seen a prettier sight. It was like the bounding of a deer, lithe, agile and sure. As he sprang past "first," touched "second," and then raced madly over to "third," hundreds of voices called the warning — "Slide, Slide," — and Jack slid. His fingers touched the base as the third base-man sprang in the air and caught the ball; but a man had come home and the score was 1 - 1.

Jack got up, brushed the dirt off his clothes, and darted a few steps off from the base. Again and again they tried to catch him; again and again they failed.

The cheering had increased until it was one uproarious, indistinguishable noise; but, suddenly, there was a silence; the man at the bat had struck out. The next went out on a "fly" to centre field, and then another pretty hit brought Jack "home." Score 2 - 1. Oh, what a clamor! What blowing of horns! What hoarse screaming! What jubilant dancing and throwing up of caps and flags on the bleachers! Then again, silence, as another man struck out.

From that time on, both teams played remarkable baseball. On each side the men were put out in "one, two, three, order." As Jack came in from the field, at the end of each half, when the home team had their "outs," he invariably looked to the grand stand, where his eager eye singled out Barbara, in her radiant beauty. He would wave his cap, with boyish enthusiasm, and she would respond with her handkerchief or the purple ribbons. She was so proud of him; she couldn't help that; so glad his side was winning, for she, as well as the rest of that immense crowd, now ceded the home team the victory; and yet, in her heart, there was a dull ache, and she found herself wondering if Jack would ever fail in anything.

The last of the "ninth," and the visitors at the bat! The first man struck out. Good! Of course, is not the game ours? The crowd from the bleachers swarmed down on to the field, and again and again had to be driven back as they came too near the players.

"Ah, what's this? A base-on-balls. Steady, Conrad,"

and Conrad steadied, striking out the next man.

"Two out, play for the batter," screamed Captain Norton, but the batter made a nice little hit which brought him safely to "first" and advanced his comrade to "second."

"Two out, play for the nearest base," called Jack.

It looked well for the visitors ; still the victory was, of course, secured. Two out, and one of the poorest batters up! A special crowd gathered near "third" ready at the instant the game should be finished to rush to "second," seize Jack and carry him, in triumph, around the field. Another little crowd had their eyes fixed on the pitcher for the same purpose. The in-fielders bent low, hands on knees, eyes on the batter ; but he was there, determined to win renown. A hit? What would it not mean? For him, too, a pair of bright eyes were watching ; words of sweet praise were waiting.

"Ball one," called the umpire.

"Good eye, Old Man! Good work! That's the boy! Wait for the good ones!"

"Strike one."

Ah, that would never do. What was he thinking of, fool that he was ? Another such good one would not go by him. He swung his bat, and took the next ball fair and square. He had struck with all his force, and the ball went hissing through the air, straight into Jack Norton's hands.

A hot liner, of course. A difficult catch, but Jack never failed. With a yell of triumph, the crowd surged toward the "diamond." Hadn't they known, all along, who would win ? Couldn't they trust that Jack Norton ? But what was this ? Three men were seen to be rushing madly around the bases ; the home players were here, there, everywhere. Mad confusion reigned. The yelling of one side ceased suddenly, and was, as suddenly, taken up by the other.

What had happened ? Why, Jack Norton had fumbled the ball. He had dropped it, turned to pick it up, accidentally kicked it with his foot, finally recovered it, and then thrown wild to "first." Two men had come in, and the score was 3 - 2, in favor of the strangers. What matter if the next man struck out and the game was ended ? It was lost, and the championship was lost, and his

untarnished reputation was lost. At the critical moment, he, Jack Norton, had failed his team, his college and the girl he loved. What matter if the ball had been a terrific one. He had not only fumbled it, but had lost his head, like any green schoolboy. Oh, it was awful; it was tragic! Tears of humiliation, stood in his eyes. His friends surrounded him with words of comfort; of praise for his otherwise wonderful playing, but they fell on dull ears.

Oh, to get away from them all ; to be alone, and then to curse and to swear. Yes, it would do him good, and *how* he would swear ! He couldn't see Barbara, not then. He must go home, and have it out with himself ; later, perhaps, but not then.

He tried to lose himself in the crowd; he would jump on a passing cart, and so be hurried back to his room. He was nearing the grand stand now. Oh, how many were pointing the finger of scorn at him; and she, too, was there, looking. What was she thinking ? He would send her a message ; tell her to go home with the others and he would try to come down later. Surely, she would understand.

Just then a classmate thrust a paper into his hands. It was a torn bit of a score card, and on it was scribbled in pencil these words, " I'm *proud* of you. Come to me at once. I am waiting."

He looked up, and though the tears, of rage and disappointment, were still in his eyes, he saw her, and she was waiting ; standing a little apart from the rest, at the entrance to the grand stand. Her coal black eyes were fixed upon him with a look burning and intense ; a look whose meaning he could not fathom. Certainly she did not seem angry or disappointed. He almost felt that her eyes had in them a look of triumph and pride.

As he came nearer, she stepped down to meet him ; took her place quietly and naturally by his side ; handed him her parasol, and just brushed his hand, with hers, as she did so. The touch made him shiver, and his heart was filled with a great foreboding. Surely, if his chances were slim before, now had he, indeed, lost all hope of winning her.

He realized, suddenly, that she was talking; chattering volubly about everything and nothing. She had a bright sally for each passing acquaintance ; but for him, no word of sympathy. Ah,

she was kind ; she was thoughtful. Somehow, she piloted him through that hideous mob, and, once outside the gate, she put her hand for a brief second on his arm, and drew him away from the crowd.

Where was she leading him ? He cared little. Ah ! yes, the grove. It was only a short distance from the ball field, and he had asked her once, long, long ago, to go with him there, for a walk. He turned and looked down into her face with a grateful but pathetic little smile, and he was answered by that same inscrutable expression of seeming triumph.

Did she gloat over his failure ? Surely, she had too much heart for that. They were in the woods now, and the cool dampness was refreshing on his flushed face ; the odor of the pines, comforting. Turning from the beaten path, she led him to a secluded little nook, under a tall, spreading tree. There, she sat down, and he threw himself at full length beside her, burying his face in the cool leaves, and carpet of pine needles. His body shook with dry sobs, and, occasionally, a deep groan, which he could not control, escaped him.

She sat beside him, quiet, immovable ; only, once, she put restraining fingers on his head, but she did not try to stop him ; she did not offer a word of consolation, and, yet about her lips, there played a little flickering smile, a smile of triumph.

When, at last, the groans had ceased, and the sobs came at longer and longer intervals, and she realized that the first paroxysm of grief was over, she spoke softly.

"Jack." No answer. "Jack." A deep groan. "Jack, is your heart broken ?" A smothered something which she took to be words, though perfectly unintelligible. "I didn't hear you, Jack."

He half raised himself and turned his head slightly towards her. "Oh, Barbara, it's too dreadful. I've lost you, and I've lost the respect of the whole college, as well as having lost the game, and the championship."

Barbara was smiling openly now. Had she no heart, little wretch ?

"I shall never dare look any one in the face again."

Ah ! he was proud, this perfect man. Hadn't she a right to

smile ? Proud, and a wee bit conceited, and a little selfish, and so, as she looked at him in his grief and anguish, her heart was singing. She put her hand timidly on his, " It's my fault anyway, Jack."

" Your fault ! What do you mean, Barbara ? " He was sitting up now, her hand held fast in his.

She grew a little frightened, at his nearness, but went on, boldly. " I gave you the four-leaf clover, didn't I, for luck, and I told you to put it in your *left* shoe, which always brings *bad* luck, and I didn't want you to play well, Jack. I don't want you to be perfect." Her voice seemed to be dying away now in delicious, melting cadences, and the words came, haltingly, " I couldn't ever be happy — with — a — perfect — man."

And then Jack Norton suddenly realized that the little clover leaf had indeed brought him luck ; and that when he thought he had lost all he had gained all; for that all was a woman's love.

Inside the Rope.*

BY EDWARD ALLISON GALE.

HAT earthly use is there in trying to go any further? I say let's camp right here. Eh, Hal?"

The lad dropped his chain and sat down on the corner of a convenient boulder. He took off his hat and wiping the perspiration from around the edge with a blue cambric handkerchief continued:

"This here is as level a spot as we'll find if we hunt a month. What do you say, Mr. Stevens?" addressing the surveyor of the party, who had just come up.

"Why, it's all right I guess," replied the man, "might as well camp."

They dropped their packs, built a fire, and in a few minutes the appetizing odor of coffee and bacon filled the air.

"Killed a rattler over yonder, Hal," laughed the lad, "and according to your well aired theory of mates, we'd better string the lariat."

The man addressed, a heavy set, powerfully built young fellow, frowned at the lad. "Time you've had as many narrow escapes as I have, you won't feel so gay 'bout rattlers," he growled.

"Go ahead, tell us again about your sister being killed, or you losing a finger," taunted the lad.

The elder man was silent. He got the hair rope, over which a rattlesnake is never known to crawl, and carefully strung it in a circle around the little camp.

"There now you're safe, Granny," laughed the lad. Then spreading their blankets they smoked and talked until sleep carried them away. The lad, his active brain conning a dozen different subjects, was the last to drop off. He was thinking about that red-headed girl down at the boarding house and how

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he had put molasses candy in her hair. She had been very angry, had thrown him down and sat upon his chest. She seemed to be still sitting on him, and she was getting heavy. He stirred uneasily in his sleep, then became dreamily awake.

He must have been asleep a long time. The fire had burned very low, only a few red embers remaining. The moon was shining clear and bright. It slipped behind a cloud for an instant. Now it was out again. What was that? Something apparently on his chest. Looked like the limb of a tree. He stirred a trifle. The object moved also, and there was a slight hissing sound. He could feel his hair rise. His blood chilled. Unconsciously he made a little moaning sound as he realized what it was. He knew instinctively that to move was death. Sure, horrible death. He was so young to die. Could he remain quiet until morning? Think of the long hours yet until daylight and help. He dare not even call. He had no idea what time it was. He hardly dared to breathe. The snake, aroused evidently by his uneasy stirring just before waking, was ready to strike.

A thousand thoughts passed through his mind. He recalled the many people he had made miserable by his guying, or practical jokes. How he had teased Hal about being afraid of snakes. He had been thoughtless. Oh, so unthinking! He opened his eyes again. The horrible object was still poised. Waiting. Like a sentinel of retribution and death.

He fainted.

He must have been unconscious for some time. What was that singing? He opened his eyes. Day was just dawning. He felt depressed, and was about to stretch and yawn. Suddenly a horrible swaying object caught his eye. Instantly he remembered. A cold perspiration broke out all over him. He scarcely breathed. But through it all he was aware of singing. He listened. Some one was droning a weird kind of tune. He thought he could distinguish his own name. He held his breath.

"Lay still, don't move, lad. It'll soon be light. There's a rattler coiled on your chest. Don't move. Lay still, lad."

Over and over came the words. He breathed a faint sigh, and with closed eyes lay shuddering. Now the words were changed, though the tune was the same.

"Lay still. Don't move, Mr. Stevens. There's a rattler on the lad's chest. Don't move, Mr. Stevens. Lay still."

It grew lighter. So slowly, it seemed to the three panting souls as though the great sun and the world itself were being forced to move by the beating of their own hearts. There were streaks of orange and wonderful golden copper shooting through the slatey uncertainness of early dawn. It was beautiful beyond description. No artist that ever lived could have matched the colors. But it was wasted on the audience perched on the little knoll. Just a little more light.

Suddenly there were two sharp explosions.

With one motion he rose, threw his blanket from him, and started across the little camping ground. Down the back trail he tore, yelling and waving his arms. Over rocks, through pines, now almost falling, now up, always yelling, he ran. At last exhausted, he stumbled over a log and fell, rolling over and over on to a little patch of grass.

Several hours later they found him. He was sitting by the edge of a little spring, playing with the sand and water.

Pityingly the old surveyor took charge. "We'll camp here for a day or two," he said. "He'll come around after a good rest and a little medicine."

They dosed him with the simple remedies at hand, and rolling him in blankets, put him to sleep on a bed of spicy pine branches. Hal had just come back with an armful of firewood. The surveyor looked up from the instrument he was polishing, and said:

"You had the hair rope strung. Where'd it come from?"

The heavy set man laid down his armful of wood deliberately. He shifted his quid. "Hole inside the rope," he replied.

The House of Dreams.*

BY BATTERMAN LINDSAY.

WHEN I came upon the House quite unexpectedly, I experienced a shock of startled recognition, but no surprise; for I had been seeing it now and again in my dreams for many years. No dwelling could have been more commonplace and unattractive in appearance. The long way of it abutted upon the road, and the steep weather-beaten slope of its roof enhanced the gray monotony of its exterior.

It was two-storied, with narrow porches extending its whole length, above and below; and from the dust of the highway one could step directly upon the unrailed lower one. In both stories, it had a door in the middle and two small-paned windows on either side, which created an uncanny impression of empty eye sockets.

Evidently it was long deserted, and so I had always seen it; but it was still in good condition, for those whom it had once served as a roadhouse had long since passed another way, and there was none to molest it.

The interior of this house had never been shown to me; so I swung from my saddle to the porch, determined to have the secret of it before going further. The door was not locked, and admitted me to a small square entry, with a door on either hand, and between them a stair, occupying the whole width of the hall, and ascending before me to the upper regions.

The portal to my right led into a parlor, where the cheap and gaudy paper was still intact, though faded and discolored, and from an empty stovepipe hole sooty streaks ran down the wall. Behind this was a large apartment which no doubt had once been the dining-room; from here one passed through a pantry under the stairs into the whilom kitchen, and from there into the front room on the left of the entrance, formerly the bar and office of the tavern. Here was a huge fireplace of rough stone, and a large

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table of home-made workmanship. Other than this there was not a vestige of furniture, not a closet or cubbyhole which could have concealed a mouse.

The secret was not hidden here.

I climbed the stairs, my tread echoing hollowly in the empty edifice. A narrow hallway divided the house in two from end to end, and in each half were four small chambers. One after another I entered them, and gazed with fatuous gravity at bare walls and floors; baldly naked to the wan light of the autumn afternoon, staring in through curtainless windows. In two or three of the rooms were the soot-bewhiskered stove-pipe holes, and I explored these with a serious attention of which I should have hated to think there was any witness.

As I prowled, intermittent noises as of stealthy footfalls and faintly rustling garments accompanied me. Once, as I entered a chamber from the hall, a door connecting it with the next one closed softly. I sprang to it, but when opened it revealed only another empty space between four walls.

Once, I sneezed, and brought a cloud of impalpable dust down upon me, and inaugurated a clamor of raucous echoes that appalled me.

One by one, I completed my examination of the rooms; all were alike in their stark bareness, until I came to the eighth, a corner one. As I crossed its threshold, marveling at its strange obscurity, so unlike the others, a shadowy figure advanced to meet me through an open door, where no door should be, but an outer wall.

I arrested myself, my grasp still on the knob, and the other did likewise. My hand instinctively sought my hip, a gesture duplicated by the other.

It was an appreciable time before the comprehension grew upon me that he who was thus coming to meet me was my own image reflected in the opposite window darkened into a reflecting surface by the crowding gray-green branches of a sturdy juniper. A disregarded seedling when the house was built, it had since grown into a lusty shrub, pressing closely against the pane. I laughed sheepishly, and the echoes mocked me with cacophonous din.

It is disconcerting to hear your own laugh in an empty dwell-

ing, and you alone in it. I swore under my breath, and quickly made my way back downstairs.

Standing on the veranda, I argued with myself, attempting to convict myself of folly in permitting a chance resemblance to the fantasy of a dream to assume proportions of such importance in my imagination. In vain; for as my eye roved over the scene, now beheld for the first time, it too seemed as familiar as the sound of my own name.

On the opposite side of the road lay a small lake with marshy borders occupying the centre of an oval basin rimmed by low, bare hills of tarnished copper hue. Out of the hills at the upper end the old highway emerged, passed the house midway and went out of sight again into the hills at the lower end. The sky was overcast by a uniform dull pall and so I had always seen it. In every detail of its featureless monotony, the scene was familiar.

For me, this house certainly held something, and I must know what before taking the road again. I turned and re-entered.

Again I received a shock.

Sitting half way up the stairs, with a small derringer cocked across her knee, was a young woman.

"Don't move another step," she said.

The warning was needless. Surprise held me motionless more effectually than her weapon. But for the entirely human sound of her voice, I should have regarded her as a second illusion.

"What were you looking for upstairs?" she inquired after the mutual stare had endured several seconds.

"You can search me!" I replied fervently. "Though, now that I come to think of it, I believe it must have been you, though I did not realize it at the time."

"Don't be flippant!" she admonished crisply. "I am very much in earnest!"

"Would you object to turning that weapon a little?" I suggested humbly. "I don't mind telling you that it makes me feel quite a bit nervous."

There was just the faintest perceptible twitching at the corners of her mouth, which I regarded as a favorable sign. She deflected the barrel slightly, and looked me over consideringly.

"Can I be of any use to you?" I inquired politely.

"No thank you," she returned, with equal politeness. "My father will be back in a few moments. Or — yes! You will oblige me greatly by getting on your horse and going on wherever it was you were going."

"I had intended to pass the night in this inn," I replied.

"Please!" she said.

It was impossible to disregard the entreaty in her voice. I turned from the door, and stood on the porch, reflecting, while my pony nuzzled in my palm.

Mount and ride away! From this House of my Dreams, that held enshrined in its emptiness something so unexpectedly precious? So madly piquing to curiosity! So evidently in need of protection. That at least was sure, whatever else was mysterious.

The tires of an auto had left their broad tracks in the dust of the old road. I had noted them on my first arrival, wondering idly what errand could have brought the machine into this deserted and forgotten land. The car had stopped in front of this house, people had gotten out (the story was told plainly in the dust) and then the wheel marks went steadily on toward the hills.

Why was this girl left behind alone, a prey to fear and suspicion?

No, I would not mount and ride away.

I led my pony to the lake, loosened the cinch and let him drink his fill, then brought him back and left him before the door, with trailing rein, for so he was trained to stand till the last trumpet sounded if left so long. Then I knocked some boards off the shed which had once stabled the stage horses, and taking them in through the kitchen door, soon had a snapping blaze in the cavernous chimney. With a bough from the juniper tree I swept the dust from table and floor, and with some of the filched boards improvised a seat.

Not until all this was done, did I venture a peep into the hall to see if the bird were still there. It was; perched in the same place, — a tired and worried looking bird. Should I be able to coax it from its perch?

"Won't you come to the fire?" I inquired cheerfully. "You may as well be comfortable while you wait."

With but momentary hesitation, she complied. She seated her-

self on the makeshift bench, and basked in the firelight with evident enjoyment.

"It feels good," she remarked after a moment. "It was getting right chilly out there."

I sat on a corner of the table and waited for her to make the conversation, judging that course to be more becoming in me.

She unwound her veil and took off her hat, stabbing the pins back into it, and lifted her hair lightly with her finger tips. The worried look faded measurably from her face, and the nervous tension of her figure relaxed as she gave herself up to rest and warmth.

"If we only had a cup of tea now, we would be quite cozy," she ventured with a charming smile.

"Just what I was thinking myself!" I agreed with enthusiasm.

"No! Really, we couldn't?"

"We surely can," I assured her, and hastened to fill my camp kettle from the lake; to rake out a bed of clear coals on the hearth and set the kettle over them on two flat stones. I produced my package of tea, my few lumps of sugar, and my one tin cup. The top of my flask made a second, if diminutive, drinking vessel, and very quickly we were drinking tea, and munching crackers in perfect good-fellowship.

"It is just like one of Mrs. Wharton's or Robert Chambers' stories. Their people are always eating or drinking something," my mysterious girl said, giggling delightedly. She was very young, certainly not more than nineteen, and though her manner was perfect in its decorum, I could not doubt that the roots of her soul were steeped in joy of this adventure.

Moving unthinkingly, from somewhere about her the derringer dropped to the floor. She gazed at it in round-eyed horror.

"It might have gone off!" she breathed.

"It was impossible not to laugh as I stooped to pick it up. She grew prim again instantly.

"All the same, I should have used it, if you had not stopped when you were asked!" she said.

I hastened to assure her that I had no doubt on the subject.

"What were you laughing at when you were upstairs?" she asked suspiciously.

I related my disconcerting encounter with my own reflection, when I also had been quite sudden with my pistol, and we laughed over it together.

"Do you know," she confided, "I thought you were laughing because you knew I was there, dodging around from room to room to keep out of your sight. Truly, did you not know I was there?"

"I *felt* it," I returned soberly. "But in that idiotic way we mortals have of denying all the subtle best of us, I told myself it was a childish imagining."

She regarded me thoughtfully. "And you do not think it strange for me to be here?" she inquired.

"As incredibly strange," I replied, "as if, picking a pebble out of my pony's shoe, I had found it a diamond."

"Well, *you* are here also!" she returned, instantly on the defensive.

"I am quickly accounted for," said I. "A civil and mining engineer, temporarily idle, I am doing a little prospecting on my own account. It has always been a theory of mine that this country was never more than scratched a little on the surface."

"Just what my father says!" she cried. "Are you a Berkeley man?" she asked irrelevantly, her eyes upon my pin.

I admitted the fact. "I wonder if you knew my cousin, Billy Billings? He is a D. K. E., too."

It was my great good luck to have known Billings well, and forthwith we were in hot pursuit of further mutual acquaintanceship. But presently her brow clouded, and she consulted her toy watch.

"Dad surely ought to be back by now," she said, with a return of her anxiety. And then she quite simply expounded the mystery of her presence, which, after all, was no mystery.

"A few weeks ago, a man came to papa in Los Angeles, and told a tale of having located a mine, the richest ever, but he had never done his assessment work on it. He was without the price of a meal, not to mention enough to get him over here and he offered to show papa the place and give him a half interest, if he would come down here with him and re-locate. He said there are too many people prowling around through this country these days —you for instance— and that somebody else was liable to redis-

cover and locate his precious mine at any time. He got papa interested finally, and prevailed upon him to come, and I made dad let *me* come, just for fun. About noon we stopped here with the intention of eating our lunch, and papa went down to the lake after a pail of water. I got out and came up on the porch to peep in the windows of this house. In the wink of an eye that ungrateful wretch was off with the car, and left papa and me staring at each other from opposite sides of the road like a pair of Cheshire cats. And the worst feature of it was, he had the lunch basket!"

I silently passed her the cracker tin. She took one and nibbled it as she continued.

"We held a council of war, and decided the only possible thing to do was for dad to walk back ten miles or so, and try to get a conveyance of some sort at a ranch we passed. I never walked that far in my life, at once I mean, and would have been a great hindrance to him, when time is so important. And we both thought I would be perfectly safe in this old house, so papa gave me his derringer and left me. And not a soul came by, or a thing happened until you."

"Are you not rather glad I happened?" I ventured.

"Yes, I am," she answered frankly. "It was getting mighty spooky for a fact, and cold. But I wish now that my father would happen."

"As if in answer to her wish there was a sound of wheels outside. She whisked to the door, and I followed, not too far behind to witness the look of tense anxiety on the face of the newcomer give place to one of pleased relief on beholding his daughter, safe and joyous. The sight of my pony must indeed have given him some bad moments as he approached.

My *inconnue* cleared the situation at once by introducing me as one who belonged to the same frat as Billy Billings, and had been "most kind."

"Very glad to know you, Mr. Stanup," said the old gentleman, extending his hand with perfunctory cordiality. While his daughter adjusted her hat and veil, and looked for her gloves, his eyes rested thoughtfully upon my range pony. Suddenly his face lighted. He turned with animation to me.

"That looks like a mighty good little broncho," he suggested.

"I presume my daughter has told you of our ridiculous predicament. It has occurred to me that if you would drive her on to Hawthorne, and lend me your pony, I might outwit that scoundrel yet. He knows no more about a machine than I do about roping a steer, and he is bound to come to grief before he gets very far. I used to be very familiar with this country once myself, and I can come pretty near locating that mine now without any further assistance from him. It can be but a short distance from here in an air line, and I can cut through the hills on the pony."

The suggestion was promptly approved by me, and Daughter's protesting "Papa?" was met with a somewhat brusque reply.

"It is the best that can be done, my dear. I am determined not to be made a monkey of by that scamp. There is a decent hotel in Hawthorne. Mr. Stanup will take you there, you will engage a room for me and register us both, and I will be with you some time to-morrow."

He imprinted a hasty salute upon his daughter's cheek, and was off at a swinging lope across the plain. Daughter turned to me with a little laugh that was almost a sob.

"You seem to be in for it!" she said.

"It sure looks as if I were elected," I replied, dissembling my exceeding joy, lest I should appear to be taking an unfair advantage of the situation. Then I proceeded, as matter-of-factly as if nothing epochal had happened to me, to give the team a drink and extinguish the fire upon the hearth. For I would have no snapping sparks destroy my blessed House of Dreams. Perchance I might wish to pass my honeymoon in it. Nothing could seem beyond the bounds of possibility now; not even that I should win this fair maiden whose name I did not know as yet, but whom my heart had joyously acclaimed at the very moment when she was pointing a pistol at my head.

As we drove away from the House, Papa rode into a gully between the hills and disappeared from our view. And under the brooding sky in all that dun world, there were but we two, as alone as the first pair.

By the Law of Islam.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

HE Governor of Hamadan sat in his morning court of justice. Picture to yourself nothing resembling a judicial court in the Occident. The Governor of Hamadan's court was merely a spacious chamber, embellished with mirrors, and for the most part furnished with a handsome rug and supporting cushions at one end. On the rug sat the Governor, with his sword across his knees, and flanked on either side by two grim functionaries — the Sheik-ul-Islam, or chief mullah of the district, and the Mujtahed, a high religious interpreter of the law.

The Sheik-ul-Islam, being a Sayed, or descendant of the Prophet, wore, in virtue of that blood, a huge green turban and a voluminous robe of the same color. The Mujtahed was similarly attired, but in spotless white, that no hand of an unbeliever dare touch at the risk of swift punishment. Both were old men, with long henna-dyed beards, and features possessing about the same degree of gentleness that you might discover in the expression of an eagle. Doubtless they were endowed with the full courage of their fanatical convictions, but as boon companions one might seek elsewhere with pleasure if not profit.

Near by, but at a respectful distance, a group of mirzas, or clerks, squatted on their heels, busy with ink horns, scrolls, and sand blotters.

From an antechamber, a succession of litigants and prisoners were thrust or dragged before the Governor. As a rule, the procedure in each case was extremely brief, there being no counsel to argue at length, move for adjournments, or take appeals. The Governor listened to the statements made on both sides, weighed the evidence on the basis of his knowledge of the people, consulted with his ecclesiastical colleagues, and delivered judgment.

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"You now have my permission to go," said the Governor. That settled it, as of old time, according to the law of the Medes and Persians. Then the litigant went forth to adjust his shoes on the threshold of the antechamber, and join his friends in the outer court, there gathered, a picturesque crowd of fierce desert tribesmen, begging dervishes, long robed mullahs, traders, soldiers, and all sorts of people.

If, by the will of Allah, a prisoner had been sentenced to the bastinado, the executioner was waiting for him with a bundle of supple green switches.

Between cases the Sheik-ul-Islam and the Mujtahed solemnly puffed from their kalyans, and discussed a text from the Koran or the neat turn of a verse of poetry with the Governor. The cries of a victim being trussed up to receive the bastinado did not in the least interfere with this agreeable pastime.

In this fashion presently there was dragged before the Governor a disheveled and ragged-clothed object. His unkempt black hair hung about his neck, his features were dust begrimed, and his wrists and ankles were heavily chained. He looked as if he had been worsted in a severe conflict. For all that, his dark flashing eyes gleamed defiance, and he carried his head with a certain proud air. He was a Kurd by race, and therefore a robber by profession. Being halted at a few paces from the Governor's rug, the soldier at the prisoner's elbow muttered a rough command.

"Salaam, you dog! Do you not see you stand before his Excellency and their Holy Reverences the Sheik-ul-Islam and the Mujtahed?"

The man turned a scornful look upon the soldier and remained erect. While the Governor replied to the Mujtahed's quotation of a verse of Jalulladin by repeating the one following, a mirza proceeded to read the charge in a monotone. It set forth that the prisoner had been caught red handed in pillaging a caravan. As a camel driver had been killed in the fray, he was charged with murder. Further, as a mullah had been injured, he was also accused of sacrilege. At the last sentence the Sheik-ul-Islam glanced from under his shaggy eyebrows at the unflinching prisoner, and mentally sentenced him to death without further consideration. Presently the Governor finished his verse from Jalul-

ladin and looked at the prisoner, casually at first, and then sternly.

"Thy name?" demanded the Governor.

"Thou knowest it," replied the prisoner.

"I know it, dog!" ejaculated the Governor. "How should I know the name of a caravan robber?"

The suggestion of a smile hovered about the prisoner's firmly traced lips.

"Nevertheless I have spoken the truth," he affirmed.

"Thou liest," retorted the Governor. "I did not hear thy name mentioned."

He turned to the mirza who had read the charge.

"What is the name of this unhung thief?" he questioned.

The mirza searched his scroll and at last replied: "He gives his name as Nazaf al Karaj, Excellency."

"Nazaf al Karaj!" repeated the Governor. "I never heard of the man before."

"Still, there is one here who will know me," persisted the prisoner.

"Doth claim friendship with the Most Reverend Sheik-ul-Islam, or the learned Mujtahed?" sarcastically interrogated the Governor.

"No."

"Who then should know thee here?"

"Thy wife."

"What!" gasped the astonished Governor. "By Allah! thou art a madman."

"I am no madman," replied the caravan robber, "and I say thy wife will not deny me."

The Governor sank back upon his cushions and stared with mingled wrath and surprise at the prisoner. That a caravan robber should claim an acquaintance with his wife was audacity almost beyond credence. He turned for advice to the Sheik-ul-Islam. That grim person waved his hand as much as to say — send him hence without further talk to the executioner. But the Governor hesitated. The prisoner's air was so supremely confident, that his statement seemed to require an equally positive refutation.

"Listen," he said, leaning forward and grasping his sword

hilt involuntarily. "You have uttered that which I am going to prove to be a lie, because I do not wish it to be whispered in the bazaar that my wife ever heard of your accursed name. Otherwise it does not alter your case. By the law you are already condemned."

The Governor turned to one of his attendants and spoke in an undertone. Then he motioned the guards to withdraw the prisoner, and went on with other cases. In a little a door leading from the inner apartments of the palace was opened, and a eunuch bearing a silver wand appeared. The Governor at once ordered the court to be cleared of others than the officers, and the caravan robber to be brought in.

Presently the eunuch drew a curtain aside, and the Governor's wife entered, enveloped in a long black chuddah, or cloak, and closely veiled excepting her eyes. The Sheik-ul-Islam and the Mujtahed promptly directed their gaze into space as if they beheld nothing but the Seventh Heaven of the Prophet, because it was unbecoming in ecclesiastics of such sanctity to seem conscious of the presence of a woman, even the Governor's wife. It was whispered in the bazaar — but this story does not deal with the unconfirmed gossip of Hamadan.

The Governor had not time to call his wife's attention to the caravan robber before her eyes fell on the man. She started, advanced a step, regarded him searchingly, and drew back with an exclamation.

"Ya Allah! Nazaf al Karaj!"

The prisoner raised his manacled hands and salaamed low for the first time before her. Astonishment opened the Governor's eyes even wider than before.

"How did you come to know the name of this caravan robber, condemned to death for his crimes?" the Governor asked his wife pointedly.

She moved quickly on to the rug before her husband and spoke with emotion.

"You have heard me tell how four years ago, before I was thy wife, I was on a journey from Teheran to Tabriz. Our caravan was attacked by robbers, and our guards fled. I was captured by the sheik of the band and taken to his village in the mountains.

But the man who was set over me for a guard listened to my entreaties, because, he said, I resembled some one dear to him who had died recently. He assisted me to escape. That man now stands before you. His presence recalls the name he had given, and which I had almost forgotten. But I remember promising I would not deny him even in the hand of the executioner. So, my Lord," she cried, with earnestness in her voice, "this man must not be condemned to death. For my sake thou wilt revoke the sentence."

The Governor looked deeply perplexed. He glanced from his wife's veiled face to the stern, hard set features of the Sheik-ul-Islam and the Mujtahed. If they displayed no sign of compassion, a light of gratification shone in the prisoner's eyes.

"My Lord," the Governor's wife began to plead again. "I — I ask that you will show mercy to this man."

The Governor raised his hand to restrain her, and fixed a long and searching look on the robber.

"Is what you have heard the truth?" he questioned.

"It is the truth," replied the robber.

The Governor sank back into thought. An obligation was laid on him which he could not ignore. A debt of honor was due the robber which must be paid. There was one way, and one way only according to custom, by which he could yield to his wife's petition and release the robber. He felt compelled to adopt it.

"Very well," he said, addressing the robber. "You are more fortunate than you deserve in having such a one to seek your pardon. To that voice in your behalf I will listen. Therefore I shall take this course. No doubt some miserable wretch can be found in the prison, so dissatisfied with existence that he will be willing to give his life for thine, at a sufficient price to benefit his family. I will pay the blood money. Then thou wilt be released. But see to it thou art not brought before me again. Allah is seldom so merciful to thy kind."

Then up spoke the son of the burning desert and the barren mountains of Kurdistan. In his rags and chains he seemed to stand a foot higher than his guards, in his bearing there was the dignity of a prince, and in his voice the pride of a man, fearless of death, and whose spirit no fetters could bind.

"Inshallah! O Governor, I was born a robber, and a robber I shall remain until the end. If crime there be, it lies with those who compel us to earn our bread in that manner. To accept thy offer would be useless, because, as the sun shines, if not killed in some attack I shall be brought here again. But for more than this I will not accept it, since to do so would be to barter the one act which Allah knows stands to my credit. So it is written. Therefore I demand that this matter be settled according to the Law of Islam. I will have no other man pay for this blood which is on my hands."

As the last words fell, a silence prevailed in the room, while all eyes were fixed on the robber.

"By the sacred Imams (Apostles)," cried the Mujtahed. "This Kurd is a man."

The Sheik-ul-Islam stroked his long beard and nodded assent.

A look of surprise touched with regret swept across the Governor's face, while his wife regarded the robber with admiration.

Presently the Governor again spoke to the robber in a tone addressing a man of distinction.

"Dost understand, O Sheik."

The prisoner inclined his head in acknowledgment of the Governor's sense of the fitness of things by bestowing a complimentary title.

"Dost understand," went on the Governor, "that I have no other means of freeing thee from death?"

"I understand," replied the Kurd, proudly. "Again I refuse thy offer."

"That is thy decision?"

"It is so written by the Will of Allah."

The Governor glanced toward his wife and made a sign for her to depart. She moved reluctantly toward the curtained door, and turning for a moment fixed her eyes on the caravan robber. His chains rattled as he raised his hands to his forehead in the form of a salute.

"For the sake of the one thou didst recall to my mind, thou art here," he murmured. "And thou hast kept thy word in not denying me, a robber in the court of thy husband. That,

I will not stain with the price of blood. So may thy happiness ever increase."

The curtain fell behind the Governor's wife, and a hushed sound — perhaps it was a sob — floated back into the court of justice. Then there was silence again, while the Governor, the Sheik-ul-Islam, and the Mujtahed gazed pensively downward. Presently the Governor lifted his head and gave an order sharply.

"Remove the prisoner's chains." Then turning to an attendant: "Bring hither a robe of honor and a cap of lambskin, the finest in my wardrobe. These things do at once."

The orders were obeyed as quickly as possible, and when the caravan robber's rags were exchanged for fine garments, the Governor led him to a seat on the rug. Then kalyan and coffee were served, the Sheik-ul-Islam yielding to the robber the privilege of taking the jeweled mouthpiece first. Thus for a space they drank and smoked, calmly discussing the Kurdisd method of casting a falcon, until the hour that was set by Fate arrived.

Then the Governor rose and conducted the Kurd robber out into the outer court. There two Arabian horses, the best from the Governor's stable, waited restively in the hands of grooms. Standing beside the finest of the two, a blue black mare of the breed of Nejd, the Governor held the stirrup while he invited the robber to mount. At such an honor the escort looked dumbfounded. When the robber was seated in the saddle, the Governor lightly sprang on to the back of the other horse. In the meantime the Sheik-ul-Islam and the Mujtahed has been assisted to climb upon their white mules.

Thus side by side, with the arms of the escort flashing in a blaze of sunshine, the Governor and caravan robber rode to that place from whence one of them would not return.